

If you weren't here last week, we talked about what an ebenezer is. In short, it is a "stone of help." It stems from the story of Samuel in 1 Samuel, when Samuel places an ebenezer at Mizpah as a sign of God's help and intercession amid the raid of the Philistines. God helped deliver the Israelites at that time and therefore, a "stone of help" was dedicated as a reminder to all that God indeed is helper and refuge and strength. The ebenezer served as a reminder of the importance of faith and the power and grace and hope received through faithful obedience to God. And because God has been helper in the past, we, as God's church today, can trust and have faith that God is still our helper now and will always be our helper.

As we talked about ebenezers last week, and God-moments worth remembering, I will admit that I didn't quite expect what would happen in the next 48 hours.

You see, we had a big God-moment here at the church this past week.

A live fire here in the building happened on Tuesday of this past week. I will not say the fire was started by God. What I will say is that God was with us in many big ways.

1. The fire occurred in a rather remote part of the building- the Terrace Level (basement), in a half bath with the door closed. This is below the fellowship hall. The motor of an electrical exhaust fan had gone bad, caught fire, and fell to the counter and sink below. Paper towels on the counter caught fire, causing the flames and billow of black smoke. In that space, only the fan unit, counter and sink will need to be replaced. The rest of the cleanup will be cosmetic. Nothing in the adjacent rooms, which are two storage rooms filled with supplies for the school and scouts, was harmed in any way.
2. The fire occurred at a time in which approx. 80 of the weekday school students had just been picked up from school, with only two small classes remaining. Both of those classes were preparing lunch and were able to evacuate the building promptly and calmly without anyone getting hurt. Unfortunately, lunch got left 😊 The school does a great job preparing teachers for times like these. You hope to never need to act but in this case they did.
3. The fire occurred in a location and at a time in which the weekday school was in session, meaning teachers were in the area, able to smell the hint of smoke. Without the teachers and school in that area, there is no way to know when the church staff, on this end of the building, would have been able to know a fire was alive. What about the alarms and smoke detectors, you ask? Again, thank God the teachers and school were there because the alarms and smoke

detectors faulted and failed to communicate both internally and externally. Because of this, had the fire happened at night when no one was in the building, we may not be sitting here in this building today.

4. The school was able to contact Jody promptly and call out to 911. In which we later realized, the fire departments had just wrapped up another emergency call and were on route back to their stations when our call came through. This made for an extremely quick response time. An engine was on site in less than 5 minutes. And if you happened to drive by, you know that about 12 different fire vehicles were present and ready to help in any way- including 2 ladder engines and about 30 fire fighters.

Our FPC God-moment this week was through the courage and response of teachers, school staff, Jody, fire fighters, and very brave children. Our FPC God-moment this week was through the hedge of protection from the Holy Spirit to have the right people in the right place at the right time for a chance of response to even be possible. Our FPC God-moment this week is in the resolution of a faulty system that can now be fixed and replaced to ensure the safety and security of all who come into this house for worship, education, outreach, and fellowship. And we have been made aware, not by a catastrophic event or tragedy, but a rather small and isolated wake up call with very minimal damage.

We don't just read about God-moments in scripture. God-moments happen all the time, every day. Do we believe? Can we see, or feel, God at work? God-moments are marked by our recognition of when God intercedes on our behalf, inspires our faith, or turns us around or draws us in, and the modern use of an ebenezer has come to serve as a sign and seal, or symbol, we have that reminds us and connects us to that faith and life altering moment.

What might you think if I told you we don't have to look very far to find an ebenezer. We have two everyday ebenezers we celebrate as Christ's church. In the church, sacraments are everyday ebenezers because by definition, the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of communion are both signs and seals of God's love, claim, grace, and joy. Baptism and Communion both mark God's gift to us of a new covenant established in Jesus, and how Jesus came to save us, all of us.

Something powerful and unmatched is present in the meaning and faithful practice of baptism and communion. What? The power of God stirring, erupting, joining, pouring, surrounding, loving. Without God (Christ), we are nothing. With God (Christ), we have purpose and belonging and everyday is a great opportunity to remember who we are and whose we are. As our scripture text this morning tells us, the authority belongs to God, and we, as God's children, just have to trust and have faith.

(Move to font) Baptism is an example of an everyday ebenezer for everyday is a day in which we are able to celebrate God's claim upon our lives and hear, "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased." God's claim on us celebrated in the sacrament of baptism does not expire and doesn't wear thin. Our covenant relationship with God does not expire, no matter how hard we might try. Our baptism is an everyday reminder of God's grace that saves us and delivers us and helps us and empowers us. We don't have to be immersed in water everyday by a pastor or even be present at a baptismal font. The mark of the Holy Spirit on our hearts and in our minds and the fruits of the spirit expressed and received in life are an everyday ebenezer, not only for ourselves, but all those we meet. We are all to remember our baptism and be thankful.

(Move to table) And communion is an example of an everyday ebenezer for everyday is a day in which we are called to trust in God for our daily bread and everyday is a day in which we are given the privilege of being a part of a community drawn together and connected through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. We are especially reminded today, World Communion Sunday, that God's gift of community and communion transcends cultural boundaries all across the world. God's table is indeed large, very large, and God makes room at God's table for all who seek to be loved by God and do their best to love God in return.

Did you know? World Communion Sunday (originally called World Wide Communion Sunday) is a gift of the Presbyterian Church to the larger ecumenical church. The first celebration occurred at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1933 where Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr served as pastor. Dr. Kerr first conceived the notion of World Communion Sunday during his year as moderator of the General Assembly (1930). World Communion Sunday grew out of the Division of Stewardship at Shadyside. It was their attempt to bring churches together in a service of Christian unity—in which everyone might receive both inspiration and information, and above all, to know how important the Church of Jesus Christ is, and how each congregation is interconnected one with another. When asked how the idea of World Communion Sunday spread from that first service to the worldwide practice of today, the following response was given,

"The concept spread very slowly at the start. People did not give it a whole lot of thought. It was during the Second World War that the spirit caught hold, because we were trying to hold the world together. World Communion symbolized the effort to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. It emphasized that we are one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Every time we eat of our daily bread, we are all to do so in remembrance of Jesus and be thankful.

God-moments! Ebenezers! Baptism! Communion! We celebrated and remembered one of these everyday ebenezers already this morning. Let us now come together in Christian unity to celebrate and remember the other now.